



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Submission for OMB Review; Comment Request

The Department of Agriculture has submitted the following information collection requirement(s) to Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for review and clearance under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, Public Law 104-13. Comments are requested regarding: whether the collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of the functions of the agency, including whether the information will have practical utility; the accuracy of the agency's estimate of burden including the validity of the methodology and assumptions used; ways to enhance the quality, utility and clarity of the information to be collected; ways to minimize the burden of the collection of information on those who are to respond, including through the use of appropriate automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology.

Comments regarding this information collection received by **[INSERT DATE 30 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER]** will be considered.

Written comments and recommendations for the proposed information collection should be submitted within 30 days of the publication of this notice on the following website

www.reginfo.gov/public/do/PRAMain. Find this particular information collection by selecting

"Currently under 30-day Review - Open for Public Comments" or by using the search function.

An agency may not conduct or sponsor a collection of information unless the collection of information displays a currently valid OMB control number and the agency informs potential persons who are to respond to the collection of information that such persons are not required to respond to the collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Rural Utilities Service

TITLE: Special Authority to Enable Funding of Broadband and Smart Utility Facilities Across Select Rural Development Programs

OMB CONTROL NUMBER: 0572-0156

SUMMARY OF COLLECTION: The Rural Utilities Service, Rural Business-Cooperative Service, and Rural Housing Service, agencies that comprise the Rural Development Mission Area within the United States Department of Agriculture, are issuing this final rule to establish the authority authorized by Section 6210 of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018. This rule describes the procedures by which these agencies will consider projects eligible for special broadband authority and Smart Utility facilities.

On December 20, 2018, Congress passed The Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 Farm Bill) (Pub. L. 115-334). In addition to sweeping changes in broadband program authorities, Congress provided for special use of funding from other RD programs for broadband deployment in Section 6210, “Smart Utility Authority for Broadband.” The provision granted the Secretary of Agriculture the discretion to allow recipients of grants, loans, or loan guarantees under RD programs to use not more than 10 percent of such funding to finance broadband infrastructure in areas not served by the minimum acceptable level of broadband service, as defined in this Part, and which will not result in competitive harm to a current RD loan, grant, or loan guarantee. While Section 6210 only imposes the competitive harm restriction with respect to RUS loan, grant, and loan guarantee recipients, RD has determined to apply the restriction RD-wide, consistent with the statutory guidance on conflicts and duplications of awards provided in 7 USC 2204b(d)(2).

Rural community leaders, businesses and utilities must consider broadband availability and uses as they plan for, and implement, new and improved facilities and services to support community and economic development. While integration of communications technology into a planned investment can be used for internal purposes, it can also serve as a catalyst to rural broadband

deployment efforts. For example, investment in health care, public safety and businesses can be enhanced or leveraged to expand the availability and utilization of advanced broadband in rural areas. Smart highways can facilitate vehicle to infrastructure communications to enhance driver safety; smart water systems can remotely detect contaminants before they pose a health risk; smart pipelines can report leaks and structural weaknesses before they become dangerous; and smart grid systems deliver enhanced security and energy efficiency, as well as speed recovery after an electric outage. Through this regulation, RD enables limited integration of broadband deployment with other rural investments funded through its broad suite of programs. It does so without adding the burden of seeking funding through separate program areas.

NEED AND USE OF THE INFORMATION: The collection of information is necessary for RD to determine an applicant's ability to borrow under the terms of the 2018 Farm Bill and included programs and that the applicant complies with statutory, regulatory, and administrative eligibility requirements for loan assistance. As part of that submission, applicants are required to provide a service area map, where applicable, of their entire service territory.

DESCRIPTION OF RESPONDENTS: Businesses or other for-profits

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 159

FREQUENCY OF RESPONSES: Annually

TOTAL BURDEN HOURS: 239

Dated: July 13, 2021.

Levi S. Harrell,

Departmental Information Collection Clearance Officer.

*Billing Code 3410-15

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